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ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

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Pursuant to: Montana Environmental Policy Act
Section 69-6504 (b) (3)

and

The National Environmental Policy Act of 1969

Project No. FG-23

Rosebud State Recreation Area

September 18, 1972

Prepared by

Montana Fish and Game Department

Recreation and Parks Division

Helena, Montana

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

ROSEBUD STATE RECREATION AREA

I. PURPOSE

This project will upgrade present facilities and add new facilities in the existing recreation area.

II. DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT

The work will include the installation of a 15 unit camping loop including tables, stoves, garbage cans and racks, latrines, drinking water, road work and miscellaneous traffic control devices, signs and site cleanup.

The work will be done within the limits of the presently used recreation area and is intended to provide the user with improved access and additional basic facilities. It will also allow better control of use and, therefore, better protection of the site, which is presently being overrun by vehicles.

III. DESCRIPTION OF EXISTING ENVIRONMENT

A. Human Resources

Rosebud State Recreation Area is located on the south shore of the Yellowstone River at Forsyth, Montana, a town with a population of approximately 1,900. Though the recreation area is not within the city limits of Forsyth, it is surrounded by the town on the south, east and west sides. In addition to receiving heavy local use for fishing and picnicking, the site is presently visited by tourists who travel Interstate No. 15, which skirts the south side of town, and who are in search of suitable camping, picnicking, and other recreation facilities.

B. Physiography and Geology

The site is located on the south shore of the Yellowstone River between the river and an Army Corps of Engineers flood control levee which roughly parallels the river along the north side of town.

The area is on the flood plain of the river and is underlain by 15 to 45 feet of flood plain deposits. The alluvium consists mostly of silt and sand, but includes some clay and gravel.

The general area is in the unglaciated Missouri Plateau section of the Great Plains Physiographic Province. The Yellowstone Valley narrows near the site as the river traverses more resistant sandstone members of the Hell Creek Formation (Cretaceous).

C. Land Use

The site, which contains approximately 24 acres, is presently being used as a recreation area. In addition, the south terminus of the Cartersville irrigation dam, which crosses the Yellowstone, is located about midway through the site. At this point, a small area is set aside to stockpile riprap for use on the dam, and also includes a cable tower for transporting the rock into the river. Prior to its use as a recreation area, the site was used as a dump for miscellaneous rubble, brush, and other garbage.

The southerly boundaries of the park lie on the flood control levee which is a grass-covered, earthen structure, approximately 15 feet wide at the top and rising above the natural ground level from 7 to 10 feet.

Across the levee and south of the park is the City of Forsyth. Adjacent to the levee and the park, and southwesterly from it, lies the city park which includes a swimming pool, baseball diamond, running track, playground equipment and picnic facilities. Directly to the south is a residential area. To the southeast lies the county fairground.

D. Fish and Wildlife

Paddlefish are beginning to show up in this stretch of the Yellowstone River and considerable interest is generating on this species. In recent years approximately 30 to 40 of the paddlefish have been caught ranging in size from 20 to 40 pounds. In addition there are pike, walleye, catfish, sturgeon and ling in the river which provides fair to good fishing opportunity. Most of the fishing is done from the shore.

The area is small and little wildlife is found in the area. Pheasants and sharptail along with whitetail deer are found in the general vicinity and occasionally one of these species will be found in the park site.

E. Vegetative Resources

The site is situated in a cottonwood grove which is interspersed with grassy open spaces and thickets of hawthorn, Russian Olive, willow and other deciduous brush covers.

Near the levee on the westerly end of the site is a marshy, low area, and a pond of stagnant water which appears to be ideal mosquito habitat.

F. Climate

The elevation at Rosebud is 2,515 feet above sea level. Temperatures during the summer months range in the 80's and 90's and will exceed 100 degrees on hot days. Winter temperatures are not extreme although readings below zero are not uncommon. Generally, the climate is moderate.

G. Transportation Systems

There are no transportation systems on the site. Near the site run the city streets of Forsyth, which end at the flood control levee. The only road

into the site is an extension of 15th Street, which traverses the levee and is being used as the park entrance road.

Interstate 15 passes through the south side of town a few blocks away.

H. Utility Systems

There is one electrical transmission line which traverses the site from the town on the south, through the area, and across the river to the other shore. There are only two power line structures on the area and they will not be affected by the project.

IV. EVALUATION OF ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

A. Environmental Impact of Proposed Action

While all of the developments will be on the flood plain of the Yellowstone River and outside the protection of the levee, they will be installed in such a way as to not significantly obstruct flood flows nor be a hazard to downstream facilities.

Generally, the roads will be designed to fit into the natural terrain as much as possible. Cuts and fills will be kept to a minimum with back slopes as flat as practicable. Ditches will be shallow and used only where absolutely necessary. In most cases, the are will be "sheet drained" so that the natural drainage is preserved.

No large trees will be removed. There will be some clearing of brush and shrubbery within the construction limits of the road, but most will be left as screening with clearing done only selectively.

During construction, equipment will be confined to the road surfaces. Topsoil will be stockpiled and replaced on cuts, fills and road shoulders, and will be reseeded at the completion of the work.

The main entrance road will have a 24 foot wide driving surface with 2 to 3 foot shoulders. Interior two-way roads will have a 20 foot wide driving surface with 1½ to 2 foot shoulders. One-way roads will have a 12 foot wide driving surface with a 1 to 1½ foot shoulder. Camping spurs will be 20 feet wide by 30 feet deep and pull throughs 12 feet wide by approximately 100 feet long including approaches. Block parking areas will be approximately 20 feet deep from the shoulder of the road.

The roads, parking areas, camp spurs and pull throughs will be field located to take advantage of natural openings so that three and brush cutting will be held to an absolute minimum.

The sanitary facilities will consist of two new and two existing vault latrines. These will be wood structures 4 feet square and will include sealed fiberglass vaults which will be pumped as required, with the sewage disposed of in a legal manner off the site.

The latrines will be located with their deck levels above the elevation of the 50 year flood. The reference for this flood elevation has been established by the Army Corps of Engineers as being 6 feet vertically below the top of the levee. The latrines will be located on high ground toward the interior of the site away from the river. They will be protected from ice by the large trees and placed on landscape mounds, if necessary, at least 1 foot above the 50 year flood level. In no case will the landscape mounds have to be more than 4 feet high.

Drinking water for the area will be provided from the city water system. It will consist of approximately 1,350 feet of water line and four courtesy hydrants. The hydrants will be sited in protected areas and the line will include the necessary vacuum breakers and backflow checks.

Water-line ditches will be located in the shoulders of the road where possible and will meander through open spaces when not on the road shoulder.

The hydrants will be of a freeze-proof type for use into late fall, but the system will be shut off during the cold winter months.

The tables, stoves and garbage can racks will be located on gravel pads in selected open or cleared areas and will be removable, if necessary, during time of high water.

The site cleanup will consist of removing the rubble and debris that has been dumped there in the past, cleaning up of dead fall limbs and trees which will be cut and stacked for firewood, and the providing of a small outlet ditch for the stagnant pond in the south of the site.

The ditch will follow the old existing channel which has since been filled with debris and crossed by the entrance road. The ditch will be shallow and have gentle side slopes. A culvert will be provided to carry the drain water under the road and out to the river.

Hopefully, this action will lower the level of the pond and encourage a continual small flow from it. Gradual water change should take place because the ground water supplying the pond is at the river level upstream from the diversion dam, and the outlet of the ditch will be at the level of the river downstream from the diversion dam.

This project appears to have minimal environmental impact. The site does not possess any unique physical features, nor does it possess wilderness qualities. The project should not significantly affect either surface nor underground water. It will not significantly affect the flood storage outside the flood control levee, nor will the facilities be endangered or endanger other facilities as a result of the 50 year flood. Some small trees, shrubbery and grass cover will be disturbed as a result of road construction. This will be held to a minimum. The site is neither habitat nor corridor for migrating big game. The project will not interfere with any other existing land use, either on site or near the site.

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B. Adverse Environmental Effects Which Cannot be Avoided

Aside from the necessary clearing of ground covers for the roads, probably the most adverse effect will be the increased visitation which the park will receive as a result of the development. This will add to the traffic on 15th Street, the last two blocks of which are unpaved. The resulting dust and noise pollution could be a nuisance. However, in the area of the unpaved street, there are few residences.

C. Alternatives

One alternative would be to close the park and let it return to its natural state. This would seem impractical as there has been increased pressure for these kinds of facilities in Montana over the past years. In addition, the people of Forsyth are most interested in perpetuating the area both from a recreational and an economic standpoint.

Another alternative would be to do nothing in the way of development and leave the area as it is. This, too, would seem impractical as the area is presently receiving heavy use which is uncontrolled and probably creating more harm to the area than the resulting proposed development. In addition, the facilities are quite inadequate in number and there is an obvious need for more.

Other site plans and use patterns have been considered for the area, but the present proposal is the one which meets the most immediate demands of the site, allows for logical future expansion and improvement, fits best with the natural terrain and character of the site, and can be accomplished with the money available for the project.

Finally, another alternative would be to do a more complete job by providing paved roads which would eliminate dust pollution, flush toilets which would be more pleasant to use and easier to maintain, and complete site development which would eliminate the need for phased construction and the resulting intrusions during the construction period. However, this alternative is not possible from a monetary point of view. The site plan has been developed so that someday these things may be possible on a phase basis.

D. Short Term - Long Term Use

Environmental impact during the short term construction period will consist of noise and dust pollution from the road construction and related facility development. This will be minimized by watering the construction surface to hold down the dust and by working only during conventional work hours. Gravel will come from an approved pit source away from the site.

On a long term basis, the character of the use will be what is is today except that it will probably increase. Hopefully, however, in the near future it will be possible to pave the roads both leading to, and within the park. This should make traffic much less objectionable. Because the site is separated from the town by the levee and because the site has generous tree and brush cover, noise from the area itself should not be a problem to our neighbors in town.

E. Irreversible and Irretrievable Commitment of Resources

Since we are not extracting minerals, are not altering the land form, nor having any appreciable effect on the river or the ground water, there will be no irretrievable or irreversible commitment of any resources. The site could be restored to its natural state.

F. Discussion of Problems and Objections by Other Agencies or the Public

This is a popular recreation area and provides fishing and boating access to the Yellowstone River. The proposed developments are expected to receive acceptance from the public.

V. BENEFITS

There is an obvious need for recreational facilities of this type in eastern Montana as evidenced by the few that are available, the heavy use of the ones now in existence, including this present site, and by the pressures exerted upon the Fish and Game Department by local residents for this development. This site will benefit not only local recreationists, but also the traveling public who will be passing on Interstate 15, and also the business community of Forsyth as a result of the visitation this park will receive.

Recreation is a recognized, legitimate, beneficial use of a flood plain area provided the development is done in a safe manner and the environmental price is not too high. In this case, it seems to be minimal. In fact, the development could actually protect the site from the uncontrolled and damaging use which it now receives.

IV. SUMMARY STATEMENT

This project is being proposed as a result of a public demand for the work and an obvious need for the facilities. The environmental price does not seem high when one considers that the project is located on a flood plain outside the flood control levee, on land which is suitable only for open space recreation or agriculture, that adequate sanitary and flood hazard precautions have been included, and that the use of the area has not been changed.